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Public, What Use shall We  
make of Our Knowledge  
of the Evil Effects of  
Venereal Disease

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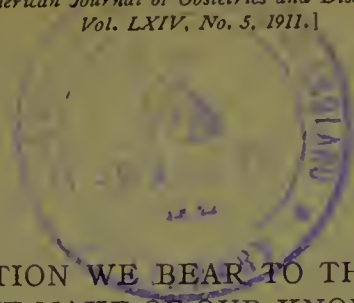
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IN THE RELATION WE BEAR TO THE PUBLIC, WHAT  
USE SHALL WE MAKE OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE  
EVIL EFFECTS OF VENEREAL DISEASE?<sup>1</sup>

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OUR Association came into existence at a time when pelvic and abdominal lesions were being studied with great earnestness. The advances being made in our understanding of bacteriology and pathology, together with surgical technic, permitted the doing of surgical operations at one time considered impossible. Papers were presented and discussions followed, developing a constantly increasing knowledge that established a position for the members of our Association on a high plane, and which attracted the attention of the public to the performance of operations that were surprising. We early had among our Fellows some of the best thinkers and workers of this country. The condition of pus in the female pelvis was very thoroughly investigated. Bold, brave, radical surgical methods were suggested and followed out. The discussions relating to these cases were clear and forcible, and at no time given in a spirit of censure, but with an earnest effort to always reach the truth. Among the Fellows who did so much, and in such a fearless manner, was one of whom it can truthfully be said he was the leader among leaders, and who will meet with us no more in this life. I refer to Dr. Joseph Price, a giant among all of his associates. In a more elaborate reference to his life work, and in a more suitable manner may his surviving co-workers do justice to his monumental efforts for the uplifting of his profession.

In the gross, macroscopical and laboratory examination and study of these pathological specimens it was soon impressed upon all that a large proportion of these conditions gave every evidence

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Twenty-fourth Annual Meeting of the American Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, held at Louisville, Ky., September 26-28, 1911.

of specific infection, the husband, in many instances, carrying with him to the altar the germs that too frequently became the source of the disease that attacked his fair bride. How many sorrowful cases could we relate, and here I wish to emphasize of how much value this line of study became to the general surgeon and, particularly, the genitourinary specialist, also in other departments of our profession. These early investigators soon recognized that the gonococcus produced the same destructive effect upon the male reproductive organs as in the female. In all of this accumulated knowledge, and in our advanced position outside of what has been done in educating our teachers, and the profession in general, have we accomplished our full duty to the parents and children of our immediate professional territory in imparting to them a plain statement of facts along lines of educational value? It is true that in our discussions, and largely in our lesser, more confidential circles, much has been talked over, a small percentage reaching into the lives of the relatives of the unfortunate patient, or striking deeply into the self-conscious feeling of guilt resting with the husband, possibly his immediate friends, thus reaching out as a warning to younger associates, but not imparting with authority as coming from an association commanding the confidence and good will, not only of our profession, but the public at large. We all know, and must admit, at the present day, how little the parents and unmarried men and women yet know of the perils that present in gonorrheal and syphilitic infection.

Some three years ago I attended a most interesting meeting at Los Angeles, at which there were present not only some of the ablest members of our own profession, but also of other professions. A most charming and intelligent Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church, an equally representative Bishop of the Episcopal Church, also clergymen from the Presbyterian, Baptist and other protestant denominations, together with representative members of the legal profession were there, and never since then have I attended any medical gathering, or any other of our association meetings, attempting to discuss this subject, where such convincing arguments were advanced nor in such an intelligent manner. The mothers of young women, in spite of all knowledge that may be presented to them, will permit the marriage of their daughters, although warned of the dangers that may be before them; however, with better instruction given them there is certainly a lessening of this evil tendency. Ignorance

of the danger that may surround the young woman leads to serious suffering which could have been avoided had she fully and clearly known the real condition of affairs. At that meeting the subject of "the white plague" was intelligently referred to, but, in a more forcible manner a medical writer present, and whom we all respect, referred to the "black plague," giving his views in a very startling talk, yet only within a short period has the public understood what this term means. We have recently had some very able articles presented, which must make an impression upon the thinking reader, for our magazines, our daily and weekly papers are attacking this social evil in no uncertain manner. The very excellent article presented some time ago in *Pearson's Magazine*, by Dr. Howard, is a convincing argument for the necessity of a franker, clearer talk with the public. In a most charming manner he sums it up under the term "prudery."

It is not to be denied that the percentage of the young men in our cities and towns is very large, who carry with them the evidence of infectious disease, yet who enter upon marital relations, some in total ignorance of the distress they may bring to their young wife, but who, if intelligently informed, would shun the perpetration of such suffering.

The study of the condition of the poor, unfortunate shop girl, in our large cities, is being brought to the attention of the benevolent and philanthropic public in a very truthful, earnest manner, and now that they are convinced of so great a crime going on in their midst, homes are being established for the care of the young woman who is honestly endeavoring to make her living, but surrounded by temptations so great that she is at last, in far too many instances, overwhelmed. We have such centers of help, protection and positive assistance as the Waverly House, through the New York Probation Association, and the Y. W. C. A. in other cities, affording aid that is of real, practical value, but not until we as a profession had pointed out the dangers from disease, that were known only to ourselves and the unfortunate victims, has much a decided effort been made to protect these young women.

Such journals as *Leslie's Weekly* and *Colliers* are to be praised and commended for the able manner in which they are presenting this important subject to the thinking and resolute public. We must recognize that in this country where members of our profession were the first to call the attention of the public to the

disease-bearing mosquito, live a people among whom there are many who can explain fairly well what is meant by surgical technic, and who are well able to define preventive medicine, who read with willingness anything bearing upon the habits and dangers of the common house fly, and profit thereby, in all these we have an intelligent ear, most willing to listen to whatever we may, as a profession, have to say on the sorrows of the social evil.

Much that we have said may be applied to the younger members of the male sex. By this I mean as early as the tenth year, as Peter Harding, M. D., says in his admirable book, "The Corner of Harley Street," "boys of this age are mentally sexless." I wish that every member of our profession—am sure that a large portion of our up-to-date laymen will do so—would read his letter x on this subject. What he has to say is beautifully expressed in language clear and not to be misunderstood.

We now have radiating out from "The National Institution for Moral Instruction," a series of lectures which I am sure are destined to be of great help to the young man. (*Maryland Medical Journal* for August, 1911.) It is a line of thought and an effort to instil into the boy, as he reaches the age of manhood, respect for women; to treat each and every one whom he meets as he would wish his mother and sister treated, and while life has its charms, it is amidst social pleasures and enjoyments that temptation may present and must be resisted. Let him remember at all times not to tempt the young woman with whom, during vacation period or school life, he may be thrown in intimate relations, bearing in mind she is the sister of someone like himself, and under all circumstances exhibit toward her the respect, delicate love and affection he would show toward his mother. These are the conditions that are being studied from the standpoint of intelligent thought, giving us the able papers of European women who are seeking a change in domestic relations, and in the customs and morals so thoroughly discussed by Ellen Key, of Sweden.

One of the ablest articles covering almost this entire subject is to be found in *American Medicine* for August, 1911. "Morals and Marital Customs." "Marriage should be encouraged, never discouraged." "The evils of bachelorhood for both sexes are many." "Marriage should never be made difficult."

Is it not our duty to place before the public more clearly our knowledge of the evil effects of syphilis and gonorrhea, and thus,



more and more, enable investigators who have the means, who have the inclination, to do something that will benefit woman-kind? It is true much is being accomplished by public lectures on sex hygiene, such as are being delivered in Chicago, New York, Boston and other large cities, but it rests largely with the members of our profession to present the subject in an intelligent and acceptable manner. Good must result from imparting to the seeker after truth such knowledge as we have in our profession. If the damage done to the reproductive organs by the diseases to which I have referred were known to the contracting parties, is it not reasonable to believe there would be a less number of divorces? It is now plainly recognized that there is no part of our physical system so persistent in its demands as that of the reproductive organs, and we may consider it as we please, but the plain facts are before us. There is no better way of meeting it than to make the public understand all the dangers that surround the violation of clean, wholesome living, so far as the sexual organs and passions are concerned. It is not to be denied there is much in our present methods of living that deters many young men and women from marrying, because of the responsibilities that follow, as they believe in meeting all financial obligations, but there must be a solution of this problem, resting only upon the respect that the sexes have for each other. I am sure I state the truth when I say there is yet above all other conditions, such as social power and wealth, whatever may be the temptation, love for children remaining. Note the record of men and women who seek the adoption of a child. A fair percentage state frankly they are unable to have children because of some damage to the reproductive organs, as an error at one time in their life. I am impressed with the fact that what has already been accomplished by our Association, and by our profession in general affords much encouragement. I am sure we are dealing with a people who desire a plain statement of facts, be it the social evil or otherwise. Above all let us present the facts to our children in such a manner that they may not hesitate to call the sexual organs by their proper names. Let them understand, when planting white and black seed corn side by side how a mixing of the two occurs. Teach them early the fertilizing of the egg and why one setting produces thirteen chicks and another nine or less.

Save the boy and girl from past ignorance regarding their reproductive organs. If we do not advance in the understanding

and presentation of this subject to ourselves, and our youth, we must expect the charlatan and libertine to continue in control of the situation.

When the question is once well understood, tremendous as it may seem, many sorrows and much suffering will be avoided.

28 EAGLE STREET.